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Joseph Dennie.





JOSEPH DENNIE.





Morning Journal, Evening Journal,

Weekly Journal, Semi Weekly Journal.

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264 Washington Street.

Boston April 6 1871.

Dear Mr. Winsor,

I have been
very much interested in a copy
of the State of People's
Literature. Will you please
send a copy, to Mr. Winsor,
and if you think proper to
send him one to enclose
in his copy, please
send him the third copy.

Yrs,
Wm. L. G. B.



JOSEPH DENNIE:

EDITOR OF

"THE PORT FOLIO," AND AUTHOR OF "THE LAY PREACHER."

By William Howard Chapman.

NOT PUBLISHED.



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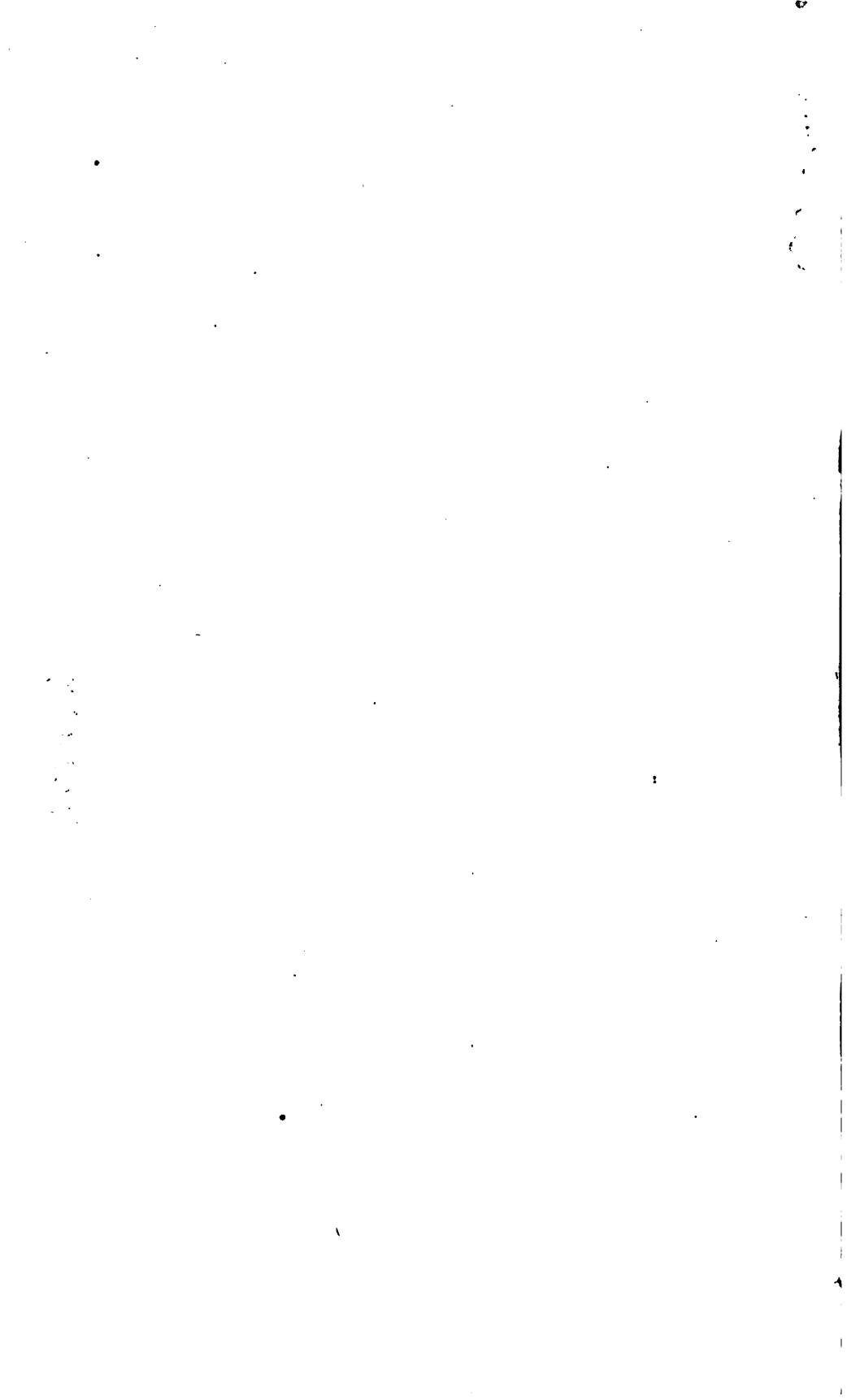
THE following sketch of JOSEPH DENNIE is presented in this form, with a view to preserve a more permanent memorial of him than has yet appeared. Within a few months, his name has twice been recalled by the presentation of historical matter connected with his life.

The portrait accompanying these few pages has been copied by the heliotype process from an original picture in the possession of the family.

W. W. C.

Boston, April, 1880.







JOSEPH DENNIE.

A BIOGRAPHICAL sketch of JOSEPH DENNIE will possess an interest to a very limited number of readers. Dennie was the most prominent of the pioneer literateurs, not only of New England, but of the United States. He lived during a period when the sterner realities of life engrossed the attention of the citizens of the young Republic. The possessors of mental acquirements found occupation which promised a more rapid grasp upon fame and fortune than could be attained by literary pursuits. If they laid aside professional cares, or relinquished the duties of the counting-room, it was only as a temporary relaxation. The development of a new country demanded the exercise of faculties which give form and permanency to society. To select literature as a profession when there was little encouragement from the general public, and only a few congenial spirits to extend a helping hand, indicates at least an innate love of letters, which is the more commendable when the barriers to literary success, which then existed, are taken into account.

It is claimed that Dennie left nothing deserving of reputation,—a judgment somewhat harsh, when it is considered what he accomplished under adverse circumstances. Mr. S. Austin Allibone is more just in his comments upon the literary achievements of Dennie; for he says: "Patriarchs of the 'lean and slippered pantaloons'—who perhaps composed a part of the 'mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease' about the beginning of this century—still extol the melodious cadence

and liquid flow of the essays of the American Addison. We ourselves are so old-fashioned as to consider Dennie a charming writer."

JOSEPH DENNIE was born in Boston, August 30, 1768. His father was a merchant, who later in life retired to Lexington, Mass., where he died Sept. 28, 1811. His son received the usual instruction given to boys. At an early age he entered a store, but mercantile pursuits were little adapted to his literary turn of mind, which developed itself quite early in life. He prepared himself for college in Needham, under the tuition of Rev. Samuel West, and, after two years of diligent application, he was examined for the Sophomore Class at Harvard College, and was admitted in 1787. With Dennie's college life commenced the trials peculiar to a man of his sensitive nature, the unsuccessful result of which had a great influence upon his future career. He was a man of strong prejudices, and formed rash conclusions. Among his classmates he was regarded as possessing a strong intellect and a brilliant genius. His ready wit and his easy address, united to an attractive person, made him the chosen companion of a large number of his classmates, while his readiness at repartee and his brilliant social attractions made him an acquisition on all festive occasions. Dennie, upon entering college, conceived a dislike to many of the tutors, whose censure he received for his open denunciation of what he regarded as the imperfections of the *régime*. He was equally outspoken against those classmates who sought preferment by a cringing demeanor and a total renunciation of independent sentiments. He was keenly touched by the alleged neglect of his merits on the part of the government in the distribution of parts at several exhibitions; and he asserted "that every rational student was ready to suppose that there was a general combination among the government in favor of stupidity,"—the rash assertion, possibly, of a disappointed competitor for academic honors.

In the spring of 1789 he returned home to pass the vaca-

tion, and was absent, owing to sickness, until the following autumn. When he returned to Cambridge, he imprudently, as he admits, insulted a tutor. For this act and his unexplained absence, he was reprimanded by the President, and degraded in his Class. While smarting under this punishment, which he thought disproportionate to the offence, he delivered a declamation, in which he alluded in the severest terms to the officers of the College. The result of this unwise effort at retaliation is contained in the following extract from the official record :—

“At a meeting of the President, Professors, and Tutors, Dec. 21st, 1789.

“Upon examination had, it appeared that Dennie’s conduct has for some time past been irregular and disrespectful to the authority of the College in general, and of ill tendency with respect to the other students, which conduct received aggravation from his being under a college censure, during said time. And in particular, that he had prepared, and on Thursday last past spoke, a declamation in the College Chapel, which, from its contents and the manner in which it was spoken, considered in connection with his aforesaid irregular and disrespectful conduct, afforded strong presumption of a design to insult the said authority. Therefore,—

“*Voted*, That Dennie be suspended the term of six months, and that he be placed under the care of the Rev. Mr. Parsons, of Amherst, or the Rev. Mr. Chaplin, of Groton, and that, during the time above mentioned, he prosecute the same course of studies which his class will pursue during the same term; and that, upon the expiration of the same, he shall be critically examined in the several branches of science he shall have studied during his absence, and that his restoration, and consequently his degree the next Commencement, shall depend as well upon the evidence his examination shall afford of his good improvement in literature, as upon his procuring ample testimonials of his good conduct, during his suspension,” &c., &c.

In a letter written a few months after his suspension, Dennie remarks, alluding to his declamation :—

1790
"Whatever might have been my views in pronouncing that parliamentary speech in the manner I did, yet, as they never could prove my crime, and the whole was presumptive, it was a downright star-chamber proceeding, and such slight grounds did by no means justify my condemnation. With regard to the Government, I shall ever feel a rooted prejudice against them for their conduct towards me, — a prejudice which no time shall destroy."

The punishment was severely felt, and stung Dennie to the quick. During his lifetime he never forgave the Government, and wherever his pen was employed in after life he gave evidence of his indignation.

Early in 1790 Dennie took up his residence at Groton, in the family of the Rev. Mr. Chaplin, and pursued his studies with the idea of returning to college. It was while here that he formed an acquaintance with Mr. Timothy Bigelow, then just commencing the practice of law in Groton, and with whom he was on terms of intimacy. Many of his leisure hours were passed in the office of Mr. Bigelow, and in after life Dennie alludes to conversations which then passed between them as moments productive of much good.

While it cannot be claimed that there was much method in his course of studies, he was diligent, covering in his researches a wide range of topics. His letters to his classmates, especially those addressed to Roger Vose, who subsequently attained to high honors as a legislator in Congress and as a jurist in New Hampshire, indicate his love of general literature, by the demands made upon the College library. His six months' residence in Groton was one of the happiest periods of his life. He enjoyed the acquaintance of those who appreciated his attainments, and he found that society which he craved. While he desired to receive his degree from the College, he wished to avoid the means necessary to secure it. "To be examined for a degree," he wrote to Vose, May 24, 1790, "after the treatment I have received, is too humiliating. I cannot brook the idea. They are acquainted with my abil-

ities. They can have no other motive to examine, except to humble your friend."

At the expiration of his six months' suspension, he returned to Cambridge. The record of a meeting of the College officers, held July 8, 1790, gives a report of his renewal of his connection with the College:—

"Dennie, who has been suspended for six months past, having now returned and made application for restoration to the College, and to the Class to which he belonged; and it appearing from the testimonials given by the Reverend Mr. Chaplin of Groton, under whose care he was placed, that he has conducted with propriety during his absence, was admitted to examination; and after examination had in several branches of science which the Class have pursued since his suspension,

"*Voted*, that Dennie be and he hereby is restored to the College and to his Class."

At the same meeting, Dennie, who was degraded Oct. 7, 1789, presented the following petition praying for restoration to his place in his Class:—

"To the President, Professors, and Tutors of Cambridge University, the petition of Joseph Dennie, Junior, humbly sheweth, —

"That your petitioner, in consequence of an insult offered to a member of the government of the University having incurred the displeasure of that body, was in the month of October degraded from his proper station in the Senior Class. Your petitioner, convinced of the impropriety of his conduct towards the gentleman insulted, would intreat his forgiveness, and pray that, influenced by this unfeigned contrition, the governors of the University would pass an act of oblivion with regard to the past unjustifiable behavior of their petitioner, and would generously restore him to that station from which by his own imprudence he has been excluded."

It was voted that the prayer of the petitioner be granted.

It appears from a memorandum appended, that the next morning, July 9, after prayers in the chapel, Dennie standing up in his degraded place while the petition and the vote were read by the President, was restored to his place in the Class of 1790.

Dennie's desire to secure his degree induced him to accept the conditions which were then imposed; but he protested against the humiliation which was the price to be paid for it. That discipline under a milder *régime* was unattainable may perhaps be inferred from the spirit of insubordination which Dennie exhibited.

In the latter part of the same year we find Dennie a resident of Charlestown, N. H., studying law in the office of Mr. West. At the first onset he was sanguine of success, and in a letter written a short time after his arrival he remarks:—

“With regard to my future prospect—a subject of my serious consideration—thus much may be safely hazarded. At the expiration of my clerkship, provided I deem the opening of an office in Boston a romantic attempt, I can find an establishment in Vermont, where, though I should be enveloped in solitude and woods, yet, in consequence of the people's love of litigation, bread and independence might be secured. It is true some sacrifices must be made, and liberality often bleeds at the shrine of interest. Yet in the infancy of a profession 'tis chimerical to talk of undeviating integrity. Let hair-brained enthusiasts prate in their closets as loudly as they please to the contrary, a young adventurer in any walk of life must take advantage of the events and weaknesses of his fellow-mortals, or be content to munch turnip in a cell amidst want and obscurity.”

The expression of such sentiments as these would lead one to suspect that it proceeded from a person whose path would be onward, right or wrong. But the whole life of Dennie gives assurance that it was his fixed determination not to barter his integrity for an inheritance, and the pride of a high spirit which made him the enemy of all sycophants, that

674. 11
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were the obstacles in the road to pecuniary success. Owing to the constitutional debility of Dennie he was the sport of the elements, the wintry winds often obliging him to keep his room, and all his efforts were paralyzed by the hand of disease. In one of his letters he writes: "I wish you would grasp the pen of erasure, and strike out Consumption and Hectic from my vocabulary. I hate the discordant sounds." During these hours of confinement he was subjected to periods of great depression of spirits, when he resorted to artificial stimulants for support; and as we are all desirous to lay the blame of our conduct upon fate and fortune, in his case they were certainly copartners. It was his endeavor, however, to lead a regular philosophic life, listening as attentively as possible to reason, and keeping wild, delusive passion at a distance.

5 Feb. 1791

In the month of October, 1791, a visit to Connecticut and participation at the Commencement of Yale College appears to have given him fresh impulses, and he renewed his studies with great vigor. At this time a sense of dependence upon his parents — a bounty never extended but with the greatest cordiality — appears to have taken strong hold of his mind, and occasioned him many useless hours of trouble; but while alluding to their long-continued, ample, and frequently undeserved favors, he regrets the forced obligation of still being a recipient of their bounty, and adds: "I have not been able, *honorably*, to earn a shilling since my return; and your wishes, as well as my own sense of propriety, forbid me to 'wring from the hand of a peasant his *vile* trash' by any indiscretion."

10 Oct. 91

One of the leading traits in Dennie's character was his kind remembrance and affectionate fondness for his parents. To his mother he was attached most sincerely, and towards her he always turned for advice and aid. During absence, his letters to her breathed that pure filial love which had its birth in the cradle and increased with his years. "During the course of my pilgrimage," he writes, "I have found many friends, but only *one* mother. For two and twenty years you

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have been uniformly my guide and patroness. To you I am indebted not only for existence, but its happiness and continuance. This frail and feverish being long since would have dissolved had not your lenient hand smoothed the pillow of sickness and arrested the arm of death. When I reflect on these things, when I see you in my 'mind's eye' the same affectionate friend in all circumstances, and in every change of situation, I feel almost ready to sink under the pressure of obligations. May I live to reward your kindness, and may you live to witness my gratitude.

' Me may the tender office long engage
To rock the cradle of your drooping age,
With lenient arts extend my mother's breath,
Make languor smile and smooth the bed of death.' "

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Dennie's letters to his parents journalize his daily life. He wrote from the impulse of the moment, and his style fully expresses the uncertain portion of health which fell to his lot. At times, when in the enjoyment of fine spirits, his letters were lively and gay, and then again, when fatigued with study, or suffering as he did from the effects of cold, he was splenetic and morose. He toiled hard to acquire mastery of the art of writing and speaking with that brilliant, seducing, commanding eloquence which is necessary in the legal profession, both for fame and money, believing, as he did, that law is a nauseous pill, not to be poured down the throats even of the vulgar without gilding. Addressing his mother, he asks: "Do you wish to know *once more* how I live? I have told you so often myself, that I am determined now to employ another. Otway's Chaplain, describing to Chamont his own life, describes mine:—

' I rise in the morning early, study diligently,
Eat and drink soberly, live cheerfully,
Take my innocent pleasures freely,
So meet with respect, and am not the jest of the family.' "

After a sickness of many weeks' duration, Dennie alludes to his hopes and anxieties in one of his letters, from which we make the following extract:— 1789. 1790

“ This ramble, through what John Bunyan of pious memory calls the valley of the shadow of death, excepted, nothing remarkable has intervened since my last. I was very pensive when your letter came to hand. There are moments in the most active life when the world holds to us a frowning aspect, when we add to the number of our foes and subtract from the sum of our friends. Even I, aided by my cheerful spirits, sometimes think so curiously, as Horatio says, as to think thus. In this moody sadness your letter was read, and afforded me so much consolation, that, though prior to its perusal this world appeared to me ‘a sterile promontory,’ yet by the time it was finished I exclaimed, It is good for us to be here, and to set up tabernacles of rest. I judged from many parts of your letter that you really wished to see me, and thought as well as I that our absence was irksome. To me it is so in very deed. Not that objects are unpleasant here, but because they are pleasant at home. The Swiss, it is reported, feel dejection when away from their bleak mountains; even the Caledonian loves his country, barren and comfortless as it is. I too love my natal soil, where I can see the frequent faces of friends, and where the tender charities of parent and sister are known. I have been separated from you nearly fifteen months, but the recollection of home is ever present with me, and some few untoward circumstances flowing from ill-health excepted, I will do your fireside the justice to assert that *we* can be more happy than in any other situation. I have become quite moderate in my desires; my fancy, tired like Noah’s dove with flying to and fro, is at length satisfied to trudge in the footway of life. Ambition formerly took me to an exceeding high mountain, and showed me all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; but of late I avoid the *sight*, conscious that I never shall have *possession*. I mean by these sentiments that romantic projects I have laid aside, and that I now contemplate only the probable and the true. I have found an inconvenience in castle-building. I derive pleasure from the erection of these goodly edifices, but next morning, or next

week, when I see the cement fail and the foundation rotten, I pity the workman, who has worked while day lasts, but who has walked to his building in a vain show, and has disquieted himself in vain. Themistocles, when asked what price he could afford for the art of remembrance, replied that he could afford a much higher one for the art of forgetting. Had I this latter art as it respects many things, it appears to me I should give no money for the secret of happiness. Not that the past incidents of my life are of so black a nature that memory cannot view them without remorse, but I wish for the power of forgetting or avoiding those ideas which induce disquietude."

In a letter dated July 10th, 1793, is the first allusion that we have to his practising law. He says he "plead two afternoons successively and successfully, for I gained some applause for my prattle and two dollars for my labor," a small sum for such work, and less than lawyers now ask for ten civil words.

In the fall of 1793 Dennie engaged in a new profession. His own account of this episode is so well related by himself that we give it in full.

CHARLESTOWN, N. H., January, 1794.

MY DEAR PARENTS :—In my last letter, written some time in August, I hinted at a visit in September. Some arrangements made for that journey were frustrated by the influenza, which attacked me with violence, and continued long. As soon as my feeble voice could be again heard, I contracted to periodically exercise it in a manner that has precluded hitherto a sight of Lexington. I was unwilling to announce this contract till permanently made, and till its *fruits* should appear. I shall now, as Matthew Henry saith, "this mystery exposite and unfold."

The clergyman of this village died in July. Of course, for a few weeks after his demise, the pulpit was vacated. That I could read, perhaps with more than mediocre propriety, was early suggested to some of the chief characters here by the partiality of those juvenile friends whom, amid the dulness of

a winter's eve, I had amused with the scenes of Shakespeare. On a Sunday, when, in expectancy of a neighboring curate, the villagers had convened and were disappointed of their homily, Esquires Stephens and Hubbard, at the request of the people, requested me to read the Liturgy of the Church and a sermon of Sterne. I diffidently complied, and was candidly heard. The inimitable union of grandeur and simplicity that Paley asserts is discoverable in the Church service, operating on ambition, induced such a degree of exertion in the reader as to gain, though perhaps not deserved, the applause of the hearers. A candid Claremonter, who, in Goldsmith's phrase, with open mouth swallowed my words, favorably reported to the wardens and vestry of a vacant church at his native village. Accordingly the ensuing week I received an *official* message from Judge Kingsbury, a leading member of the Episcopal Society, desiring me to be at the trouble of a visit there to read prayers on the next Sunday. This was the first moment that I conceived the project of rendering my talent gainful, — of allaying in some *small* degree my thirst for independence, and *partially* relieving you from the *justly* intolerable burden of my support. I cheerfully conned my task on Saturday afternoon, and foreseeing from a knowledge of my ear-soothing powers and the blind admiration that *mob* has for sound, — foreseeing the probable issue of this business, on Sunday morning I sallied forth on this clerical enterprise, like Haman, joyful, and with a glad heart. I read the popular sermon of Sterne on the character of the Good Samaritan. The next day, in full vestry meeting, it was *unanimously* voted, that a committee of the wardens should request me to contract for four months as a *Reader*, at the rate of 24 s. per Sunday. I obligated myself and regularly officiate. This business, when in embryo, was darkly suggested to you by my friend and landlord Hedge; has been erroneously understood in Boston; grossly, I believe, misrepresented to you, and probably the source of some disquietude. Some, as I am informed, have *ingeniously* conjectured that I have renounced my pro-

fession ; others wonder how the airy levity of my spirit can be confined in a pulpit without evaporating indecorously, and all talk of the fantastic junction of lawyer and priest. But that *sage*, though small, portion of Massachusetts soothsayers, who have chosen to augur so inauspiciously my fate, cannot discern, though your good sense easily can, a capital distinction between *Reader* and *Inducted Clergyman*. A casual glance on the ecclesiastical etiquette of Great Britain, which the Episcopalians here servilely copy, discovers to *you*, that a mere *Readership* does not in the least militate with my secular and lay employments, that it demands not hypocrisy of heart or face, but *decency* of life and such a mode of reading as your kindness, the instructions of *Dame Rogers*, and the *boyhood* perusal of your little library have inspired. My *priestly* engagements have created nothing like fickleness, nothing like disgust of law or abjuration of the bar. The revenues of the Church of these infant Republics are too scanty to allure from an avowedly lucrative profession a young man whose ambition is daring, and who, though despising *Pelf* for its own sake, loves it for the consequence that in these "costermonger times" it procures. Nothing is more remote from my intention than a resignation of law practice. The task of Sunday does not in the least derange the study of Blackstone. The essence of the whole is this, that a day formerly passed vacantly on in miscellaneous reading, is now dedicated to a useful exercise in elocution, which, by accustoming me to the sight and criticism of the many, inspires confidence, furnishes me with energetic Biblical phrases, and fancy with happy allusions, and lastly furnishes a small stipend that pays my board and defies the mechanic's dun. You know, or may know, that such is the versatility of Alcibiades that on Sunday he can seriously read a homily, and on Monday fluently chatter in a cause. No more difficult than to put on or lay aside a hat. This is a picture of my actual situation. I have plead often within six months at justice's courts and received 12 s. for each harangue.

In this prolix, though necessary narration, I have fairly tried, and perhaps have fully exhausted, your patience ; but I deem it dutiful and expedient to develop my situation and my views ; and having filled so much paper concerning the *Pulpit*, it now remains to mention the *Bar*. It is now three years since I commenced the study of law, and you naturally ask why tarry the wheels of my chariot ? Agreeably to the etiquette of the Hampshire courts it is necessary that a student be proposed, as the phrase is, three months prior to his admission into an office, and three months prior to his taking the oath of qualification at the expiration of his clerkship. As I did not arrive at Charlestown in September, but on the eighth of December, consequently I was proposed in December term for admission in March ; therefore, by the same rules, it most *arithmetically* follows that I am not admitted to my oath till March ensuing. Then I sally forth a rural attorney, armed at all points for the wordy war.

It was my original intention, when I first entered the office of West, to practise law somewhere in the Massachusetts County of Middlesex or of Suffolk. But the information of my law acquaintance in Boston, a long and particular conversation with Rufus G. Amory, a thorough read lawyer, grown gray in this knowledge, and my own acquaintance with the subject, have induced a departure from my original plan. In the villages within fifty miles on every side of the capital there is such a hatred of litigation on the one hand, and such a host of able attorneys to foment this Norman spirit on the other, that to establish myself there would be the *dernier ressort* of desperation. In Boston, the *rational* inhabitants of that vain port most wisely suppose that none but Parsons and Sullivan can draw a declaration upon a common note of hand. Hence we behold a shoal of junior lawyers keeping vacant offices, mere barber shops, for the purpose of idle assemblage and chat, never darkened by the shadow of clients. Without a writ to fill or a cause to support, and begirt on every side by ten thousand allurements to exorbitant dissipation, they are com-

pelled to seek a precarious support from the gaming-table, or else, in mere desperation, marry some Tristram Shandy bonneted girl of fortune, vilely suffer themselves to be carried home by her to a father's house, there to lead a life, in Shakespeare's phrase, most *slinkingly dependent*. Now I would rather cut my throat with a penny razor than suffer even a plan of such a life to sweep across my mind. No resource therefore remains but to tolerate the inconveniences which accompany new settlements, and choose a station somewhere in this northern corner of New Hampshire. Lawyers here are in estimation. They are considered depositaries of information. They have influence, for they have property. An aristocratical order of men in *any* government command respect; and our lawyers are perhaps more allied to aristocracy than yours. Bills of cost are high, and notwithstanding the scarcity of money *fees* are promptly paid. The upper counties on this river offer plausible encouragement to lawyers, and as soon as the spring opens, if a better chance present not itself in the lower part of Cheshire, I shall commence practice at the Grafton courts. No man, however prescient, can determine the color of future fate. Whether I prove, therefore, an employed or neglected advocate, is yet to be proved. I shall not be a *silent* one. With modesty I cannot predict now and boldly pronounce myself a future Thatcher or Parsons. Cumberland, the author of the Observer, struck the first numbers at a rural press, with this calculation, — if his essays were jejune, the obscurity of their birthplace would save the author; if, on the contrary, they had the stamp of genius, they would soon be current in cities. I imitate this prudent plan. If in three years I can gain property and reputation, I will emigrate and open an office in Boston. If my tongue should falter or my wits abate, still in this frugal country I can live decently, and my failure will not be so conspicuous as in the eyes of expecting or disappointed friends.

By accurate calculation I can live one third cheaper here than in *any* part of Massachusetts. I am, through your bounty,

reasonably tinged with literature. Men of learning in these wilds are rare. Hence much of that sort is soon recognized and generously rewarded. Full justice is done me on the scale of abilities. The inhabitants of Cheshire are too partial. They are determined to enter court with the unshaken belief that I prove a speaker. So that, if I am merely decent in my first *aboard*, I shall have more credit and more business than in Massachusetts would be attendant on the most brilliant exertion.

I am daily more convinced that Spanish reals are a man's best friend. Without property, genius, merit, virtue, are nothing. I cannot be respected in Boston or its environs while I am poor, and while that poverty obliges me to wear a threadbare coat. Much stress is laid there on externals; and unless the guinea is expended at the tavern, unless the glossy vest is worn, characters, however amiable and knowing, are sedulously shunned. I will not give the showy men of Suffolk a chance of turning up the nose at my "clouded shoon." My spirit disdains, in ecclesiastical phrase, a residence there, without *pluralities*.

These reasons will convince you of the propriety of my inflexible resolution to commence business in this part of New Hampshire.

The inhabitants of Claremont are very importunate that I should, in the spring, enter their church "a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec"; that I should go to New London and receive ordination from Bishop Seabury. They have offered to settle me immediately, to allow me £80 per annum and the profit of glebe lands leased in Claremont and seven adjoining towns, and have pledged themselves that in ten years the profits of the glebe should rise in duplicate proportion, or an equivalent should be paid. Lest they should pay me for present services reluctantly, when they were apprised that the period of four months should forever close my engagements, I told them that, previously to a renunciation of my present profession, it was absolutely necessary that I should consult my parents for their sanction. In your reply

to this letter, therefore, which reply I will show them, insert a clause of refusal, that I may bid them in March an honorable adieu, and have my otherwise painful rejection of their proposals gratified by your positive denial.

The Church of St. John's, at Portsmouth, has indirectly sounded me on the subject of a settlement there, and has said that I should be remunerated with £200 per annum.

My neglect of law for the first year of my clerkship, and the frequent lapse in study since from ill health and dejection, induce a very vigorous prosecution of business now. For some time I have read nothing but law, and have relinquished the belles-lettres. At the time I have assigned I shall, I can candidly assure you, be competently skilled in the ordinary practice of law. You know that my natural fluency is such that, when I have a stock of ideas, words of course will follow.

In moments of dreary vacancy I have amused myself, and enlarged my knowledge of English style, by writing, at different times and in various vehicles, "The Farrago." This is a miscellaneous essay, which was first commenced in the winter of 1792, was printed originally at a village in Vermont, on the *Cumberland* calculation. In the press of Obscurity I knew that I should risk nothing either in censure or praise. The public, however, saw or fancied some merit; and, as American essays have been hitherto unmarked except for flimsy expression and jejune ideas, they have allowed me praise of reviving, in some degree, the Goldsmith vivacity in thought and the Addisonian sweetness in expression. The editor of the Boston Centinel has frequently republished these trifles, and twelve or fourteen of the most generally circulated gazettes have devoted a column to the Farrago.

I wish that you would, without reserve, communicate your sentiments respecting the affairs of the Church. Some of my friends here are of opinion that I should appear to greater advantage myself, and benefit others more, as a church divine than an advocate. I confess to you that, were the emoluments equal, I should not hesitate in choice. Undoubtedly *one* is

the more *honest* vocation. I often witness a degree of oppression in a lawyer's office almost unavoidable ; but to me, whose hands have not yet grown callous with the receipt of guilty bribes, there is something painful to the moral sense in wringing farthings from the poor misguided peasant. If liberty of election were fully allowed, my *superficial talents* — for (as some character of the drama says, "Let no man hear me") I am *superficial* — would have a better effect on the eye of mob, surveyed rather from a pulpit than the bar. I have the ready faculty of speech, but I doubt whether *profound* thought keeps pace with volubility of tongue.

A charge of fickleness, grounded on the above sentiments, would be wrong. Till I swept a warehouse the twelfth month I could not determine my unfitness to retail calico : till I accidentally read the Liturgy of the Church, I thought that law pleadings were the surest road to renown.

Mr. West this day told me, that, amid the present discouragements to bar practice, he thought the Portsmouth benefice would be a fortunate exchange.

Adieu, my dear friends ; I'm just about launching into the turmoiled ocean of life. Your best *pilotage* is necessary to the success of my voyage.

JOS. DENNIE, JUN.

In March, 1794, Dennie was admitted to practice at the Court of Common Pleas, and shortly after opened an office in Charlestown, where he continued to labor in his profession and write for several papers. Money did not pour in upon him ; but he gained sufficient to enjoy a high station on the "Rock of Independence," as he expresses it, and "slept in his office soundly, unscared," as Pope says, "by the spectre of poverty." Dennie's want of assurance was a severe drawback to him, and he acknowledged his superficiality in law knowledge when others, more shrewd and cunning, would have assumed the appearance of sages. Possessing the feelings of a gentleman, he desired to have the appearance of one, and a close observer of men he must have been to write the

2 Apr. 95

2 Apr. 93 following: "I am determined, if I am poor, never to feel, much less look so,—to wear glossy coats, and shift them before they are threadbare. Then, and not in general till then, can I, or any other *new* man, expect to receive it. 'T is the disposition of the world to withhold benefit from those who want it, and give the sum of more to him that has too much."

The want of a law library induced Dennie, in the early part of 1795, to visit Boston, in hope of being able to make arrangements whereby he could dispose of the products of his pen for a handsome equivalent,—to secure a stipend from town without its militating with his legal practice in the country, but on the contrary to extend his circle of acquaintance and increase his business. Arriving in Boston he applied for such employment to Thomas and Russell; but their limited means did not allow them to offer him the encouragement requisite to his expectations. At this time Mr. Dennie's fame as a writer began to increase. He was caressed and flattered by the leading families in town. The gay were pleased with the vivacity and originality of the *Farrago*, the aristocracy were pleased that his satire had been levelled against the foes of Federalism, and a host of friends offered their services to aid any literary undertaking he might propose. Many were anxious that he should write a comedy; but, knowing that this was not his *forte*, he finally concluded to establish a literary weekly journal. A friend offered his services to oversee the publication, and Mr. William Spotswood, then a bookseller and a publisher at 55 Marlborough Street, undertook to run the whole risk, furnishing type, and receiving half the profits,—the other half to be paid over to Mr. Dennie. It was agreed that Mr. Dennie should furnish a weekly number of the *Farrago*, and it was calculated that his share of the profits would amount to £150, an important addition to the income of a country attorney. The design of such a publication—novel in those days—was cordially greeted, and the prospectus received the names of the most influential citizens. All the numbers of "The Tablet" that appeared are before us, the first issue of which bears the title:—

THE TABLET.

A Miscellaneous Paper, devoted to the Belles Lettres.

"As a Stranger, Give It Welcome." — *Shakespeare.*

Vol. I.

TUESDAY, MAY 19, 1795.

No. 1.

The paper is printed on a sheet eight by twelve, and was furnished to subscribers at the rate of three dollars per annum, paid quarterly in advance. Mr. Dennie received his share of the first quarter's payments, and returned to Charlestown. Several writers contributed to make it an agreeable literary sheet, among whom was the Rev. J. S. J. Gardiner; and its pages bear testimony that other pens of ability were employed to render it acceptable to the public. To use Dennie's own language, "The Tablet, a favorite child, after buffeting the billows of adverse fortune for thirteen short weeks, sickened and died." The disappointment at this failure, and the origin of another series of papers, entitled "The Lay Preacher," the most elaborate of all his literary compositions, is contained in the following extract of a letter from the author, dated Walpole (N. H.), 26 April, 1797:—

"Returning in the summer of 1795, animated with expectation of realizing fortune and fame from 'The Tablet,' I sat down to the desk of composition, and was making extensive arrangements, when an unexpected and mortifying billet from Spotswood announced the death of my *child*! I never felt the inconvenience of being poor, and the anguish of disappointment, till then. For if I had been in possession of property, neither the waywardness of the times, nor the dullness of the Bostonians, would have repulsed the growth of my miscellany. I was obliged to submit; and with a little purse, and spirit nearly as diminutive, began to conceive

that my ill-luck was to be a *life estate*, and that I was one of Dryden's unfortunates, who had but an *hour*, and lost even that. In this cruel moment, the memory of what I owed to myself, urged me to make one more attempt before I bowed to the Genius of Disappointment. Musing on the fate of my paradoxes, and a vagabond like George Primrose, I sat out one evening for this place, without the merit or the consolation of being a philosophic adventurer like him. On the road I formed that plan which I have since realized, and which has attached *some* success. There was a press here conducted by a young man (David Carlisle), honest, industrious, and then a partner of Thomas. I determined, by the agency of my pen, to convince him that I could be useful; and then—my humble knowledge of human agency taught me—I was sure he would encourage me when his own *interest* was the prompter. Without saying a syllable respecting a stipend, I wrote and gave him an essay on 'Wine and New Wine,' and called it the Lay Preacher. It had been objected to my earliest compositions that they were sprightly rather than moral. Accordingly, I thought I would attempt to be useful, by exhibiting truths in a plain dress to the common people."

"The Farmer's Weekly Museum" was the paper to which Dennie contributed this first Lay Preacher. The journal was then (in 1795, when Mr. Dennie first took up his residence in Walpole) under the charge of David Carlisle, and had been in existence about two years. Such was the popularity of the Lay Preacher that the essays were extensively copied into every paper throughout the Union, and at the expiration of six months (1796) Mr. Dennie became the editor of the Museum. The original manuscript of the Lay Preacher is before us, and bears on the back of it, in the author's handwriting, the following:—

"As this is the original *first* Lay Preacher ever published, I wish you to preserve it. It was the corner-stone of my literary undertaking. It was a sudden and accidental effort, like most works in their origin. I composed it in the greatest hurry, as will appear from the bad style of penmanship."

We give the first of the Lay Preacher's discourses :—

“WINE AND NEW WINE TAKE AWAY THE HEART.”

Prophet Hosea.

— And cloud the head, and empty the purse, and beget writs of attachment, and an *intimacy* with deputy-sheriffs and jails ; and — I should become quite out of breath, and “ the time would fail me ” to recount all the mischiefs which *Wines, and new Wine, occasion.*

But I hear young Clod, my neighbor's hired man, whisper to the schoolmaster of the village : “ Our grapes are *frost* grapes, from which we cannot press new wine. You can't get a drop in all Hampshire, except what our traders sell, and that comes over sea, and is mixed with molasses in the vessel ; and when it reaches us becomes *new cider* rather than new wine.” Now young Clod, having ploughed our intervale, and chopped wood in our forests, and read Morse's Geography, has some right to conclude that the “ hearts ” of Hampshire cannot be taken away because we lack *wine* and *new wine*, and experience not when the *time of the vintage of the grape is near.*

But the wise prophet who sang to the men of Judah, many hundred years ago, the many woes of wine, though he used that particular word, meant INTOXICATION in its broadest sense. Had Hosea lived on Connecticut River, and seen our laborers lifting a tin measure to their mouths at five o'clock in the morning, swearing at noon, and staggering at night, he would doubtless have prophesied that *new RUM*, yea, and *gin sling* and *brandy grog*, “ take away the heart.”

Hear me, my dear countrymen. I am not a Universalist, nor a New Light, but I am a *moral* preacher. Though I do not whine to you from a pulpit, and have not the voice of the charmer, charming never so wisely, yet I have your good at heart, and will promote it all in my power ; and I ask no salary, but your reformation.

You complain that lawyers oppress, and that Congress tax you ; that you have no money ; that you must work hard ; and that, though some of you wish to read useful books and pamphlets, you have not cash to exchange with the bookseller.

I will hint that mode of conduct which escapes a bill of costs, supports government, makes labor light, and procures you a whole library. It will render you in very deed that virtuous and enlightened yeomanry which shall be the pride and protection of our empire.

You inhabit the banks of a river, which, though it has not been celebrated by the poets, though its waters are not so warm as those which feel a Southern sun and roll through Italy and France, has a territory on each side productive of all the *essentials* to health and happiness. The sharp air of your hills blows away disease, and your juicy beef is a better bracer than the bark. If you will sow your intervale, pay *necessary* debts, contract no superfluous ones, and drink *wine and new wine, and rum and brandy, with moderation*, believe me, you will have property enough for your occasions; you will not be haled before the judge, neither will the officer cast you into prison; but your barns will be full; your kine will, like those of Jeshurun, "wax fat"; and the shade of the prophet, if it hovered around you, might whisper, "Hearts like these shall never be taken away."

THE LAY PREACHER.

Mr. Dennie's management of the paper was highly acceptable to the public. The paper obtained a large circulation throughout the States. Mr. Buckingham, in his "Reminiscences," says:—

"As a literary periodical, the Museum had now no rival. Its circulation extended from Maine to Georgia, and large packages filled weekly an extra mail-bag, to supply the subscribers in New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and intervening cities.

"For three years succeeding this arrangement the Museum was more richly supplied with original communications of a literary character than any other paper that had then, or has since, been published in the United States. 'Colon and Spondee' came out, almost every week, with new varieties of their small wares; T. G. Fessenden produced his political lampoons, under the signature of 'Simon Spunkey'; Isaac

Story opened a shop, with the sign of 'Peter Quince,' and endeavored to rival Peter Pindar in his humorous style of versification; 'Common Sense in Dishabille' was furnished by David Everett; and besides these 'The Meddler,' 'The Hermit,' 'The Rural Wanderer,' 'Peter Pencil,' 'Beri Henden,' and numerous other writers, whose contributions I am not able to assign to the authors *by name*, enriched the Museum, and gave to it an unprecedented popularity. Dennie, however, was not merely the responsible editor, but was the enlivening spirit, around which the others congregated, and to which they made their obeisance, as the sheaves of Jacob's sons, of old, did to the sheaf of Joseph. The selected articles were of his choosing. He gathered the exotics, and his criticism stamped them as genuine products of the garden of genius. The weekly summary of 'Incidents Abroad' and 'Incidents at Home,' which was not the least attractive feature of the Museum, was prepared by him; and though this feature of the Museum has had many imitators, I know of none which can claim any near relationship or striking resemblance. The notes 'To Readers and Correspondents' make, of themselves, an amusing department. These were also the sole composition of Dennie, and were frequently written in the printing-office, and extended or contracted in length, so as precisely to fit the space in which the last column of the form might be deficient of matter."

Mr. Dennie labored with continued exertion; but he derived only £110 per annum for his literary efforts, though this, added to his law practice, which amounted to about £90 more, enabled him to live and dress according to his inclination. It was during the year 1796 that a volume of sermons, by the Lay Preacher, was published, which met with considerable success, and increased the author's literary fame. In politics, Mr. Dennie was a strong Federalist; and his articles procured for him the commendation of the government. Among his manuscript papers we find letters from Fisher Ames, Jeremiah Smith, L. R. Morris, Benjamin Russell, Samuel Eliot, and others, either approving of his paper, or

conveying substantial proofs of the acceptance it met with. Of Mr. Dennie's personal appearance, and minor traits of character, Mr. Buckingham, in his "Reminiscences," gives an account which is fully substantiated by others who recollect him. Mr. B. writes:—

"I have a vivid recollection of Dennie's personal appearance, in 1796, when I began my apprenticeship in the printing-office of David Carlisle. In person he was rather below than above the middle height, and was of a slender frame. He was particularly attentive to his dress, which, when he appeared in the street on a pleasant day, approached the highest notch of the fashion. I remember, one delightful morning in May, he came into the office dressed in a pea-green coat, white vest, nankin small-clothes, white silk stockings, and shoes, or *pumps*, fastened with silver buckles, which covered at least half the foot from the instep to the toe. His small-clothes were tied at the knees, with ribbon of the same color, in double bows, the ends reaching down to the ankles. He had just emerged from the barber's shop. His hair, *in front*, was well loaded with pomatum, frizzled, or *craped*, and powdered; the *ear-locks* had undergone the same process; *behind*, his natural hair was augmented by the addition of a large *queue* (called, vulgarly, the *false tail*), which, enrolled in some yards of black ribbon, reached half-way down his back. Thus *accommodated*, the Lay Preacher stands before my *mind's eye*, as lifelike and sprightly as if it were but yesterday that I saw the reality.

"Among his familiar acquaintance, and in the company of literary men, Dennie must have been a delightful and fascinating companion. In the printing-office, his conversation with the apprentices was pleasant and instructive. His deportment toward them was marked with great urbanity and gentleness. Being the youngest apprentice,—in vulgar phrase, the *printer's devil*,—it was my lot to call upon him for copy, and carry the proof to him. Thus, for seven or eight months, my intercourse with him was almost daily, and was as familiar as propriety would sanction between an editor and an apprentice. I never saw him otherwise than in good humor.

"Dennie wrote with great rapidity, and generally postponed his task till he was called upon for *copy*. It was frequently necessary to go to his office, and it was not uncommon to find him in bed at a late hour in the morning. His *copy* was often given out in small portions, a paragraph or two at a time; sometimes it was written in the printing-office, while the compositor was waiting to put it in type. One of the best of his lay sermons was written at the village tavern, directly opposite to the office, in a chamber where he and his friends were amusing themselves with cards. It was delivered to me by piecemeal, at four or five different times. If he happened to be engaged in a game when I applied for copy, he would ask some one to *play his hand for him while he could give the devil his due*. When I called for the closing paragraph of the sermon, he said, '*Call again in five minutes.*' 'No,' said Tyler, 'I'll write the improvement for you.' He accordingly wrote the concluding paragraph, and Dennie never saw it till it was put in print."

In the year 1798 Carlisle, the publisher, became a bankrupt, and Mr. Dennie lost his share in the published volume of the Lay Preacher and about \$500 fairly and laboriously earned by editing. It was a severe loss to Dennie, and one calculated to affect a man of his nervous temperament. The paper reverted back to its former owner, Isaiah Thomas, and Dennie, with a reduced salary of \$400, continued as its editor till June, 1798, when Alexander Thomas, the brother of the publisher, took charge of editing it, the Lay Preacher still contributing sermons, literary essays, and summaries of news to its columns. The paper, however, fell off in circulation.

During this year Mr. Dennie entered the political arena, and was nominated as Representative to Congress, but was defeated. Many brilliant offers were made to him from various parts of the Union (Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York), to assume the editorial charge of well-established journals, or become part proprietor; but a want of means and a thirst for political life induced him to refuse these overtures. Speaking

of a situation tendered to him for editing the "Independent Chronicle," then published at Boston by Mr. James White, Mr. Dennie writes: "If he had offered me twelve millions of dollars annually to conduct a Democratic paper, I must have refused the offer. It would have belied my feelings, my habits, my principles, my conscience. I should have been an infamous apostate."

Mr. Dennie's friends at court were not unmindful of his abilities and past services, for in May, 1799, he received the appointment of private and confidential Secretary to the Department of State. Mr. Timothy Pickering (then Secretary of State) in making this selection, wrote to Mr. Dennie, that, "if your genius and taste could in some degree relinquish the pursuits of literature, and submit to the drudgery of political business, I should be glad to employ you, and congratulate myself in being the instrument in availing myself of your talents." Mr. Dennie wrote to Mr. Pickering, that, in his contract with Thomas, he had agreed to give him three months' notice whenever he should withdraw his contributions from the paper, and the reply of Mr. Pickering is characteristic of the man.

PHILADELPHIA, June 7, 1799.

SIR: — I have this morning received your letter of the 1st inst. I cannot possibly desire you to depart in the smallest degree from your engagements with the proprietor of the Walpole newspaper; on the contrary, I should have considered any disposition to neglect the fulfilment of your contract as a disqualification for a public employment. Perhaps, too, it may be fortunate that you will thereby be prevented coming to this city at the season most inconvenient, and which, to strangers to our excessive heats, often proves distressing. I shall, therefore, advise your delaying your journey hither till the expiration of August, when the weather begins to be more tolerable. After that, the sooner you arrive the more you will gratify me.

I am, with great regard and esteem,

Sir, your ob't serv't,

TIMOTHY PICKERING.

Mr. Dennie left Walpole in September, 1799, to enter upon his office, which yielded him a salary of one thousand dollars per annum. He had also engagements with Thomas to contribute to the Museum, and with Fenno, of the United States Gazette, published at Philadelphia. To the latter journal he was, for a brief period, a large contributor. His office, and his reputation as a man of letters, gave him at once an *entrée* into the first society, and he availed himself of every opportunity to enrich his mind by conversation with the learned, and succeeded during his leisure moments in acquiring a tolerable knowledge of the French language. In one of his letters written at this time, he pays the following tribute of respect to the Christian religion, — which the reader must bear in mind was not intended for publication, lest the charge of egotism be urged against its author. It is simply the honest expression of a candid searcher after the truth.

“I can truly and religiously assert, that my long and assiduous habit of investigating the sacred writings has ended with me, as with Mr. Locke and Grotius and Sir William Jones, in a perfect and settled conviction of their Divine origin and matchless utility to mankind. In a concluding number of my Essays I shall add the testimony of one more layman to the verity, beauty, and use of the Christian religion. The Bible is truly a blessed book, and happy and safe is that man whose conduct, as far as mortal imbecility will allow, comports with that most salutary doctrine contained in the Gospels.”

Towards the latter part of 1800, in company with Asbury Dickens, a bookseller of Philadelphia, Mr. Dennie commenced the publication of a literary journal entitled “The Port Folio,” which appeared in quarto form, but was afterwards changed to the octavo. This publication when in its prime was the first literary journal in the country, and contained not only literary and scientific essays, but papers on arts and politics, and contributions relating to the humorous and amusing. Under the cognomen of “Oliver Oldschool,” Mr. D. catered acceptably

for a large list of subscribers, but the form of government under which he lived did not meet with approval in his eyes, and his attacks were frequent and severe. In the year 1803, his bitterness against the Constitution of the country found vent in an article, which was justly censured, and which brought upon the author an indictment for libel, which set forth that the "said Joseph Dennie, on the twenty-third day of April, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and three, at the city aforesaid, and within the jurisdiction of this court, with force and arms, and falsely, maliciously, factiously, and seditiously, did make, compose, write, and publish, and did cause and procure to be made, composed, written, and published, a certain false, wicked, malicious, factious, seditious, and scandalous libel, of and concerning the form of government of the said United States," etc. The trial resulted, as Mr. Dennie remarks in a number of the *Port Folio* for 1807, "in a most signal victory." The purport of the article is less seditious and less obnoxious in its teachings than the denunciations of more modern agitators.

Mr. Dennie continued to edit the *Port Folio* with varied success, receiving aid from the "Literary Club," and we cannot give a briefer and better idea of the independence and zeal which he brought to a discharge of the duty than by quoting the following from a number in 1807:—

"With mingled regret and indignation, the editor has been recently apprised, from authentic authority in the North, that a report has been industriously propagated and generally believed, which has induced many to assert, as a sort of axiom, that the property of the *Port Folio* had passed into other hands, and that for more than two years the editor had merely lent his name to assist the sale of that work. This rumor, false as well as injurious, must be instantly quelled, as dishonorable to the editor's character and pernicious to his property. He is the sole proprietor of this paper, of which for years he has had the absolute direction, and, if any emoluments arise from the subscription, the property is exclusively his. It is absolutely

necessary to make this statement, because it is understood that many who would willingly patronize the work have withheld their names from a persuasion that they were only advancing the interest of some venal mechanic, who walked abroad with a vizor mask, disgracefully borrowed from the editor. It is presumed that to the men of honor and cavaliers, to the real friends of his paper and party, and to those who have hourly opportunities of surveying his actions, and scrutinizing their motives, it is superfluous to declare, from education, temper, and habit, he is utterly incapable of an imposture so venal and flagitious. This for his friends. With respect to his foes, the fanatics, the propagators of this story, however they may persevere in the malignancy of their designs, or the audacity of their assertions, proofs shall be given, as long as the Port Folio is published, that the editor is deeply interested in the work, that he writes habitually in that journal, and that, if for no other purpose, he considers that paper his property, as affording him the means of ridiculing absurdity, of chastising faction, and of branding hypocrisy.

“It does not become the editor to dilate on the character of this journal, or to court favor by the speciousness of profession, or the magnificence of promise. His labor has for many years been before the public, and, if he has been censured by fanatic folly and party prejudice, he has been applauded and encouraged by the most venerable of his friends, and by a Nesbit, a Gifford, and a Reeves, — by a Father, — by a politician, a poet, and a divine. This is consolatory. In any fortune he will remember this and be comforted. In any fortune he will remember this, and go on, without the smallest compliance with the vagaries of the multitude, and without the least change, or shadow of turning. So far from the remotest attention of relinquishing this journal, or making it an object for sale and barter, he will continue to publish it upon the most independent principles, while that Power, who at least has given him spirit, graciously indulges him with the use of his eyes, however dim, or his hand, however unskilful.”

In this spirit Mr. Dennie continued to discharge his duties ; but, for many months previous to his death, his habits of conviviality had made such deep inroads upon a constitution fragile by nature, that he was unable to execute what his spirit dictated, and when he finally passed into the grave, on the 7th of January, 1812, there was a cause for thankfulness that the light of so fine a mind had been kept burning to the last. His death-bed is described as that of a man firm in the conviction of the truth and efficacy of religion, and though his days were ended without the attainment of that fame, or the realization of that fortune, which he appeared ever to think awaited his efforts, he had laid aside his hopes of an earthly for an eternal reward, with the resignation of one whose conscience brought peace and comfort in his last moments.

The funeral of Mr. Dennie took place on the 9th, and his remains were followed to the grave by a large and most respectable concourse of the residents of Philadelphia, who were sincere mourners for the loss of a man "who commanded the admiration and esteem of all who enjoyed the privilege of his acquaintance." The various newspapers of the day recorded eulogies on the departed, one of which, from a Philadelphia journal, we give : —

"On Tuesday, the 7th instant, departed this life, in the 45th year of his age, JOSEPH DENNIE, ESQ., a native of the State of Massachusetts, but for several years past resident in this city. A liberal education, ingrafted upon a mind endowed with the most active and energetic powers, and an imagination fertilized by various and extensive reading, and glowing with all the fervor and brilliancy of genius, together with a heart overflowing with benevolence, and ennobled by every private and social virtue, rendered him a distinguished ornament of general society, and the delight and solace of an extensive circle of friends and acquaintance."

Mr. Dennie was interred in the burying-ground of St. Peter's Church, and a monumental column, bearing the following appropriate inscription, marks the spot : —

JOSEPH DENNIE.

Born at Lexington,¹ in Massachusetts,
August 30th, 1763,
Died at Philadelphia, January 7th, 1812:
Endowed with talents, and qualified
By Education,
To adorn the Senate, and the Bar,
But following the impulse of a Genius,
Formed for converse with the Muses,
He devoted his life to the Literature of his Country.

As author of the Lay Preacher,
And as First Editor of the Port Folio,
He contributed to chasten the morals, and to refine
the taste of the Nation.
To an imagination, lively, not licentious,
A wit, sportive, not wanton,
And a heart without guile,
He united a deep sensibility, which
Endeared him to his
Friends, and an ardent piety, which we humbly trust
Recommended him to his God;
Those friends have erected this tribute
To his Memory.
To the Mercies of that God is their resort
For themselves, and for Him.

MDCCCXIX.

On the north side of the column is inscribed in letters of gold, the name of
"JOSEPH DENNIE."

During his residence in Philadelphia Dennie organized the Tuesday Club, which contained the notable literary men of the day. He was the centre of a brilliant coterie, which charmed all strangers who found admittance to its circle. He was welcomed to the fireside of many families, and, though there are few living who remember him, pleasant memories of him have been handed down. The late Hon. William M. Meredith, Secretary of the Treasury in 1849, in a letter written many

¹ Mr. Dennie was born in Boston.

years ago, says: "He was very intimate at my father's house, and both my parents entertained a high regard for him. He was one of the friends that I recollect from my earliest boyhood as frequently enlivening a fireside which was never dull. As he died before I was thirteen years old, I cannot pretend to give any details of his lively and agreeable conversation."

No collection of the writings of Dennie was ever published, though such a project was entertained at the time of his death. In 1796 a small volume containing the sermons of the Lay Preacher was published at Walpole, N. H. In 1801 a volume entitled "The Spirit of the Farmers' Museum and Lay Preacher's Gazette" was published at Walpole. It contained many of the brightest papers of its contributors, and a few of the sermons of the Lay Preacher. In 1816 Mr. John E. Hall, of Philadelphia, collected a number of the best of these sermons, which he published in a small volume.

In the "Life of Josiah Quincy, by his Son," the late Edmund Quincy, there are some allusions to Mr. Dennie which may appropriately find a place in this monograph.

"The member of the Class of 1790 who was the most widely known in after life was Joseph Dennie, of whom my father speaks thus in recalling the images of those early companions:—

"The most talented, taking light literature as the standard, was Joseph Dennie, whose acquaintance with the best English classics was uncommon at that period. His imagination was vivid, and he wrote with great ease and felicity. In after life he attained local eminence as an essayist, first by a series of essays under the title of "The Lay Preacher," then by others written in connection with Royall Tyler, under the firm of "Colon & Spondee," and finally as editor of a literary periodical called "The Port Folio," published in Philadelphia, and which obtained uncommon celebrity and circulation. While

at college he might unquestionably have taken the highest rank in his class, for he had great happiness both in writing and elocution; but he was negligent in his studies, and not faithful to the genius with which nature had endowed him.'

"Mr. Dennie was a most charming companion, brilliant in conversation, fertile in allusion and quotation, abounding in wit, quick at repartee, and of only too jovial a disposition. My father used to tell of the gay dinners which celebrated the not infrequent visits Mr. Dennie made him when he was keeping house with his mother. On these white days he would summon the flower of the youth of Boston to enjoy the society of their versatile friend, and the festivity which set in at the sober hour of two would reach far into the night before the party were willing to break up. In those good old three-bottle days, and indeed for the greatest part of his life, my father was visited with a mortal headache, not merely after any excess in wine, but even after the least indulgence in the good creature. This made him perforce, for many years, practically 'a teetotaller,' though he never accepted the philosophy of total abstinence, and it may be," etc. . . .

"Mr. Dennie made a profession of studying the law, but he did not waste much of his time upon the practice of it. The story goes that he opened an office in Charlestown, N. H., ready for the entertainment of clients. On a day one strayed in, but the interruption he caused to the leisure and favorite occupations of his counsel learned in the law was so great, that a repetition of the annoyance was carefully guarded against. Mr. Dennie thenceforward kept his office-door locked on the inside, and bade defiance to the busy world without. But as this mode of practising the law, however agreeable in itself, was not greatly remunerative, he soon afterwards wisely abandoned the profession, and betook himself to the more congenial pursuits of literature and editorship. 'The Port Folio,' which he established in Philadelphia, and conducted from 1800 until his death in 1812, was very far superior in literary ability to any magazine or periodical ever before attempted in this

country. Indeed, it was no whit behind the best English magazines of that day, and would bear no unfavorable comparison with those of the present time on either side of the water. Its influence was greatly beneficial in raising the standard of literary taste in this country, and in creating a demand for a higher order of periodical literature, and for more exact and careful editorship. It was strongly Federalist in its politics, and Mr. Dennie had the assistance of some of the best minds of that party in the political portions of his magazine. Among others Mr. Quincy furnished a series of papers under the signature of 'Climenole,' the name of the 'flappers' employed by the philosophic inhabitants of the island of Laputa to awake them from their scientific reveries, as is related by that veracious voyager, Captain Lemuel Gulliver. . . .

"Mr. Dennie became the centre of a brilliant circle of scholarly and accomplished men in Philadelphia, to whose social and convivial virtues the poet, Thomas Moore, has recorded his authentic testimony in his 'Poems relating to America.' While in Philadelphia, in 1804, he was made free of this congenial guild, and shared with them the pleasures of their *symposia*. It was to them that he addressed the passage in the Letter to Spencer, beginning,

'Yet, yet forgive me, O ye sacred few,
Whom late by Delaware's green banks I knew,
Whom, known and loved through many a social eve,
'T was bliss to live with, and 't was pain to leave.'

We were not fortunate enough in this country to please the young Irish Anacreon, as a general thing; and, as he says in a note to this poem, it was 'in the society of Mr. Dennie and his friends' that he passed the few agreeable moments of his tour. Whatever value we may attach to Mr. Moore's opinions as to American institutions, he may be admitted as a competent witness as to the quality of the

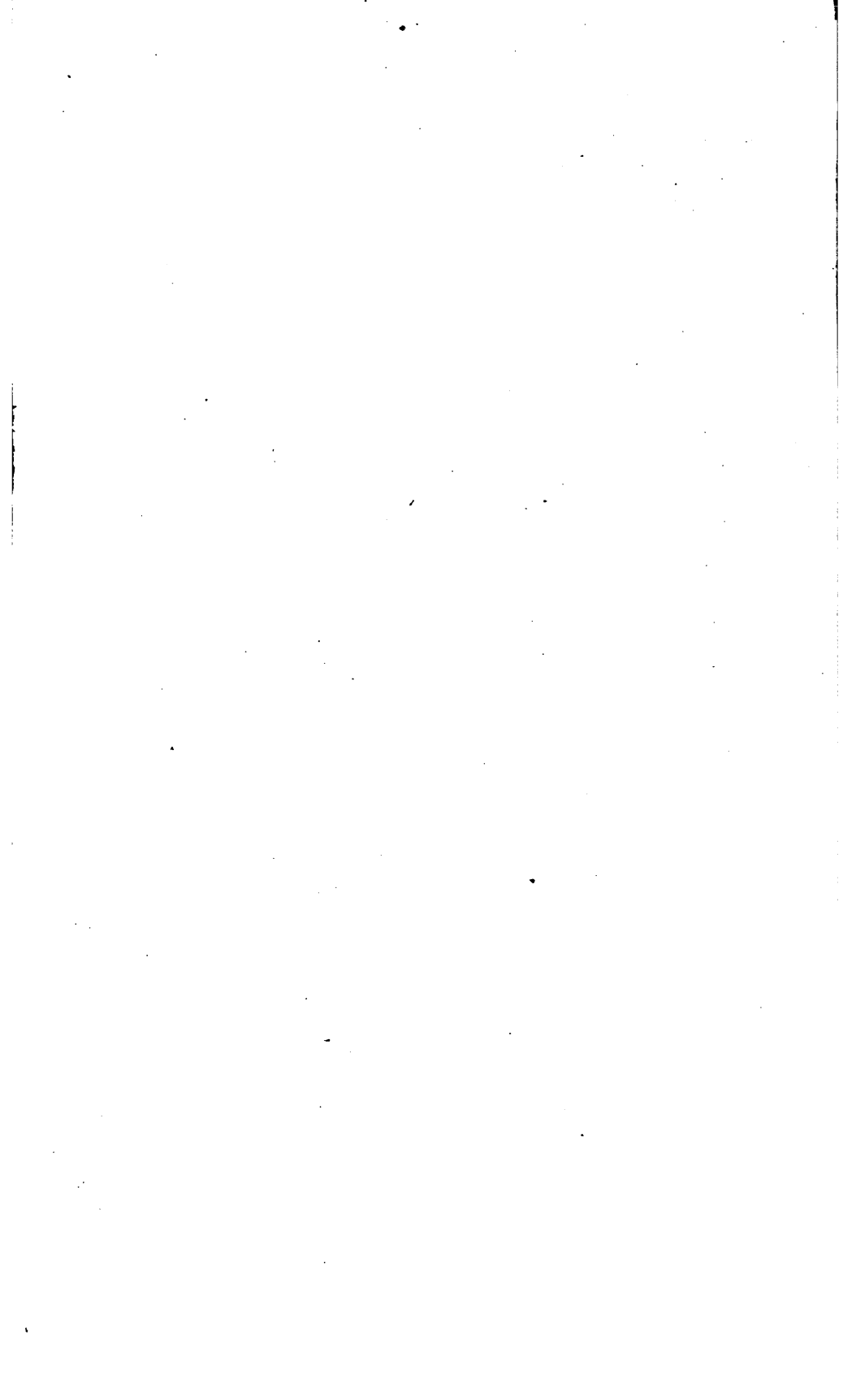
'nights of mirth and mind,
Of whims that taught, and follies that refined,'

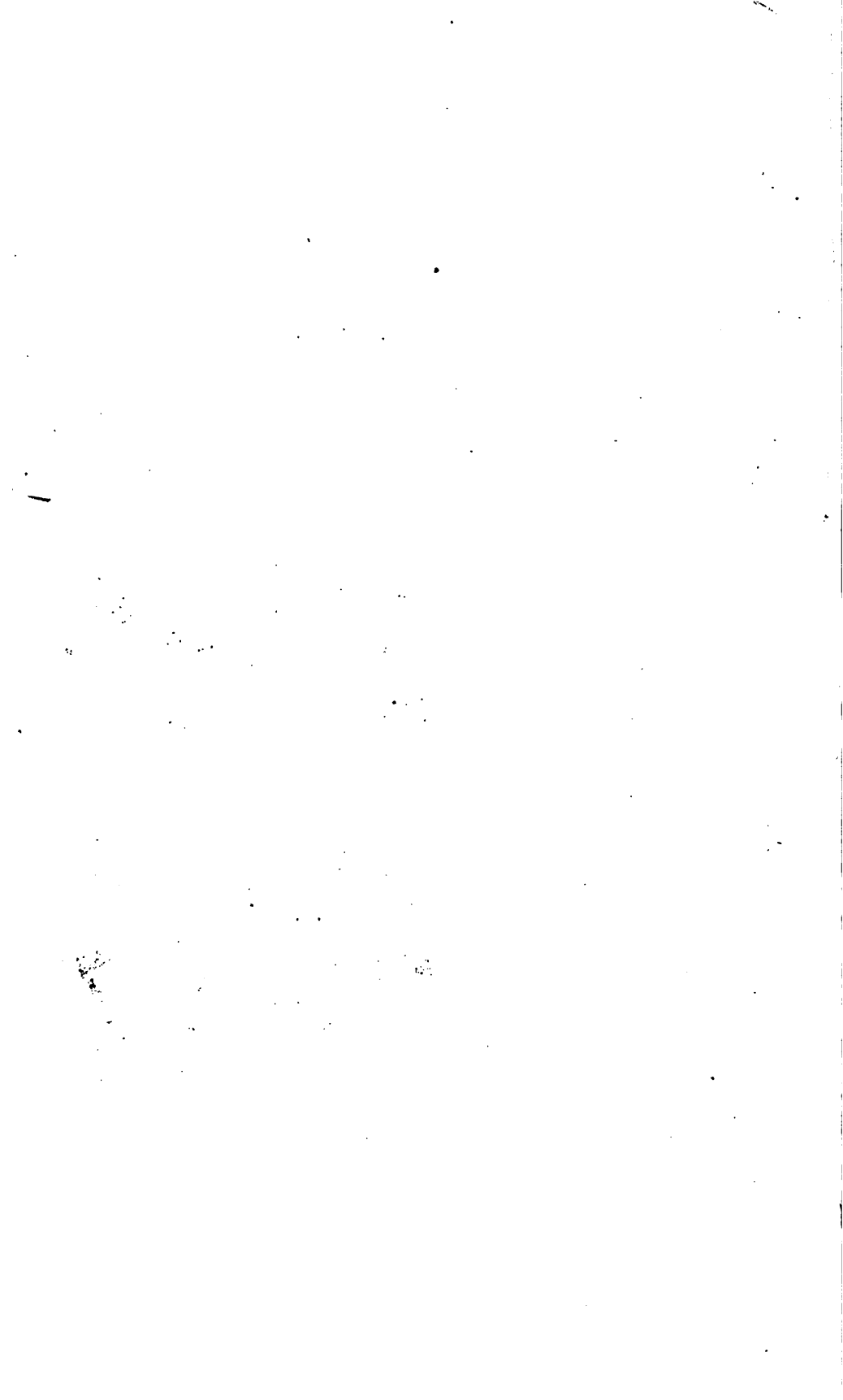
which he passed in that gay society; and also as to 'the love for sound literature which he feels so zealously himself, that Mr. Dennie had succeeded in diffusing through this cultivated little circle.' Some of Moore's poems appeared first in the Port Folio, among which was the beautiful song beginning,

'Alone by the Schuylkill a wanderer roved.'

Whenever Mr. Quincy passed through Philadelphia on his way to and from Washington, his personal intercourse with his old college friend was renewed, and their intimacy was interrupted only by the death of Mr. Dennie in 1812. The Port Folio languished on for a few years, but did not long survive its founder."







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